

RELATIONALISM

A Theory of Being

Joseph Kaipayil

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Introduction

The aim of this work is to flesh out the relationalist theory of being, ontic relationalism, I outlined in my last work, *An Essay on Ontology* (2008). The first part of this study will present relationalism as a perspective which takes us beyond the metaphysical divide of the one (monism) and the many (pluralism). In the second part, we will make a brief analysis of how our experience of relationality (the relational nature of reality) provides us some compelling reason to uphold metaphysical relationalism. And, in the third part, the question of being will be looked at from the perspective of relationalism.

Though the concept of relation has received a good deal of attention from past and present philosophers, relationalism as a metaphysical theory has not yet been adequately expounded. This does not mean that relationalism is a novel position, unknown in the history of philosophy. In philosophy, you cannot invent an entirely new concept which had never occurred to anyone in the past. The whole history of philosophy is a kind of recycling of ideas.¹ What keeps philosophy historically going is the shifting emphasis on ideas. In other words, the notion of relationalism has been suggested in one form or another in the writings of many classical and contemporary philosophers, Eastern and Western. But no sufficient emphasis on this idea

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was ever given and a full-fledged theory of relationalism is yet to emerge.

Relationalism, in a broader sense, signifies that things and events in the universe and in society are interrelated, or to put it simply, that things and events exist in relations. This familiar, common-sense notion of relationalism is evident to us in our ordinary, everyday experience of things and in our scientific comprehension of the world. As a philosophical theory of reality, however, relationalism is much more than this.

Before I say what relationalism is according to me, I should say what it is not:

- (a) Relationalism is not anti-substantivism. On an anti-substantivist view, things are not objects in their own right, but only events dependent on other events for their existence. Even if we grant the argument that relations are ontologically more fundamental than entities themselves, the question is, if there are no entities with some enduring substantivity, how do relations themselves exist? Relation is "holding" between two or more things. If entities disappear, relations also will disappear.
- (b) Relationalism is not processism either, though Buddhism and process philosophy (classically of Whitehead) can rightly be called relational philosophy. Indeed, any philosophy that gives importance to relation can be called relational philosophy. Process philosophy is relational

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philosophy in this sense. But processism is a kind of anti-substantivism, as it views existents as occurrents and not continuants (things). Occurrents, unlike continuants, fail to be real relata.

- (c) Relationalism is not relationism. Relationism holds that what ultimately exists are relations and that reality is the totality of relations. For a relationist, relata are aspects of relation, and that which is acting on and that which is acted upon are only aspects of action which is relation (cf. Oliver 1981: 156, 170).
- (d) Relationalism is not relativism either. Relativism is the view that reality comes to us unsorted and it is the cognitive subject that arranges the furniture of the world (cf. Lynch 1997: 417). Epistemological and ethical relativism, that truth and good are relative (subjective and contextual), can be the flipside of metaphysical relativism. On a relationalist view, however, reality always comes to us relationally arranged, and truth and good, though relational in nature, are not relative.

What, then, is relationalism? For me, relationalism, as a theory of reality in general and as a theory of being in particular, maintains the following:

- (a) Being (all that exists) is relational. Relationality (relatedness) is the very characteristic of

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reality, both existentially and structurally. The real (that which exists) is relational.

- (b) Reality is irreducibly pluralistic and inescapably unitary. Then relationalism is our search for the ontological principles that account for the unity and diversity of the world. As the main task of relationalism is to show rationally and systematically how the world is a unity and a plurality at the same time, relationalism turns out in the end to be a theory of the one and the many.
- (c) Every entity is a unity. Nothing can exist except as a relational unity of its constituents. This means no entity can claim absolute (unqualified) structural simplicity.
- (d) The identity of an entity is defined by its relations. These relations include the entity's intra-relations (relations among its constitutive elements) and inter-relations (relations with other entities).

What is the epistemic claim of relationalism as a theory? A theory is a model or framework to explain and make sense of the things we experience. A scientific theory is a conceptual model of the world, a model that describes the world of our empirical experience (cf. Hawking 1997: 10, 184). Likewise, a metaphysical theory is a conceptual model of the world. The only difference between a scientific theory and a metaphysical theory is that the latter tries to describe the world in more

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ultimate terms by using more abstract concepts, the concepts beyond which no rational abstraction can possibly go.

As it is possible for us to look at the world and interpret it differently, no theory is absolute and immune to revision.² Hence, in both science and philosophy, the epistemic strength of a theory is to be assessed by its explanatory potential, i.e. its ability to give a cogent explanation of a wide spectrum of reality we experience. The merit of relationalism, if there is any, is its ability to give a unified perspective on reality by accounting for the unity and the plurality we experience in the world.

Notes

¹ “Continually changing, like the phoenix that unceasingly arises from its own ashes, philosophy feeds itself and is forever being created anew” (UNESCO 2007: 240).

² Philosophy, as an ongoing critical reflection on human experience, cannot accord dogmatic status to any particular theory or any school of thought. If pluralism ceases to exist in philosophy, philosophy will cease to be philosophy (see Kaipayil 1995: 95-96, 2002: 16-18). “The death of philosophy - if such a death could be imagined - would only occur if it lost its lively multiplicity. Its essence rests fundamentally on the differences among people - on embracing this ‘otherness’, in the spirit of a constant challenge to our opinions” (UNESCO 2007: 195).

1

Relationalism in Perspective

It is important to present a philosophical theory through comparison and contrast with other examined theories of the same genre.¹ So in this chapter, I will try to situate relationalism in the context of a select few theories of reality.

The four predominant philosophical views on being or reality to date are monism, dualism, pluralism and processism. Monism holds that being is ultimately one and all entities could be reduced to that one being, whatever that be. Dualism argues that being is not one but two, and there exist two basic beings or categories of beings, one transcendent (spiritual) and the other empirical (material). Pluralism would say that reality is irreducibly plural, for there exist many kinds of beings. Finally, processism proposes that being is but a becoming, a process of interrelated events.

There are many forms of monism, dualism, pluralism and processism, both in Eastern and Western philosophies. Since it is impossible to cover them all here, I have selected four examples from classical Indian philosophy: Sankhya to represent dualism,

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Buddhism to represent processism, Vaisheshika to represent pluralism and Vedanta to represent monism.²

1.1. Sankhya Dualism

Of all classical schools of Indian Philosophy, Sankhya (also spelled Samkhya) is arguably the oldest. Kapila, who flourished most likely in the sixth or fifth century BCE, is credited with founding this school.³ The most authoritative text of the school, however, is the *Sankhyakarika* ("Sankhya Verses") of Ishvarakrishna (3rd or 4th century CE). As there is no extant authentic Sankhya work prior to *Sankhyakarika* (hereafter SK),⁴ for our exposition of classical Sankhya we rely solely on Ishvarakrisna.⁵

According to Sankhya, as for most schools of classical Indian philosophy, the highest good is permanent cessation of human suffering by attaining liberation from the cycle of rebirth.⁶ "Because of the torment of ... suffering, (there arises) the desire to know the means of removing it" (SK 1).⁷ For Sankhya, the discriminative knowledge that the soul is different from the body and is eternally liberated brings about this liberation. This led Sankhya to postulate two eternal but opposite categories of being, *purusha* (spirit) and *prakriti* (matter).⁸

Prakriti, unlike *purusha*, is unconscious, but generative. *Prakriti* in its primordial state (*mula-prakriti*) is non-perceptible because of its subtlety, but is known through its evolutes which make the physical world (see SK 3, 8).⁹ All the evolutes of *prakriti* are its effects

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and they pre-existed in the primordial *prakriti* and are non-different from it (SK 9).¹⁰ Both *prakriti* and its evolutes are characterized by three qualities (*gunas*): the pure (*sattva*), the active (*rajas*) and the dark (*tamas*). These qualities “successively dominate, support, activate, and interact with one another” (SK 12).¹¹

Prakriti exists and evolves for the sake of *purusha*, and *purusha* exists as the enjoyer of *prakriti* (SK 13, 17, 31, 37, 56-58, 60). The whole universe has been formed from this association of *purusha* and *prakriti*. But paradoxically, since *purusha* and *prakriti* are totally different categories, *purusha* cannot really involve in *prakriti* but can only be its spectator (SK 19).¹² *Purushas*, though of the same nature, are many, and this allows the existence of a plurality of individual embodiments at any given time.¹³

Birth and rebirth (transmigration) is caused by *purusha*'s attachment (passion) for and subsequent association with *prakriti* (cf. SK 45). To further explain the mechanism of transmigration, Sankhya introduced the concept of subtle body (*linga*, meaning “instrument” or “cause”), constituted by intellect, ego, mind, ten senses, and five subtle elements (SK 39, 40, 42). When the physical body (the body born of father and mother) perishes, it is this subtle body that carries the dispositions or impressions (*samskaras*) and accompanies a *purusha* into the next embodiment. As long as *purusha* keeps its close connection with this subtle body, it (seemingly) suffers pains associated with rebirth. “The *purusha* ... attains there the suffering made by decay and death; until deliverance of the subtle body ...” (SK 55).¹⁴

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The release of *purusha* (from the cycle of rebirth) is by means of knowledge (SK 44, 69). If a *purusha* gains discriminative knowledge that no *purusha* is bound or liberated or migrates, that it is *prakriti* in its modifications that is really bound or is liberated or migrates (SK 62, 64), then *prakriti* will cease to act for that *purusha* (SK 65).¹⁵ “As a dancer ceases from the dance after having been seen by the audience; so also *prakriti* ceases after having manifested herself to the *purusha*” (SK 59).¹⁶ Even after gaining the true knowledge, *purusha* remains embodied because of the force of past dispositions; but on disembodiment (death), *purusha* achieves total “isolation” (*kaivalya*) from *prakriti* (SK 67, 68).

1.2. Buddhist Processism

Siddhartha Gautama (died c. 380 BCE),¹⁷ better known as the Buddha, initiated a radically new philosophical movement that rejected all beliefs about the substantiality of God, the soul and the world. In the place of traditional substance metaphysics he advocated process metaphysics, which reduced all unities to their constituents and both unities and constituents to process.

The Buddha proposed processism as part of his solution to the problem of human suffering. According to him, human life is full of sufferings (sorrows), caused by our many desires, and the way to get out of this predicament is cessation of all desires, achieved through the enlightenment that everything is transient

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and there is nothing permanent for us to get attached to, neither God nor the world, not even one's own self.

Getting down to the specifics, the Buddhist processism consists primarily of three doctrines: the theory of impermanence (*anichcha*), the theory of no-self (*anatta*) and the theory of dependent origination (*paticchha-samuppada*).¹⁸ We make a very brief discussion of these doctrines as contained in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali canon.¹⁹

For Buddhism, there is no permanent being, from which all things spring (*Majjhima Nikaya* 1). Indeed, everything is impermanent (cf. *Samyutta Nikaya* 36.9); and impermanence (*anichcha*) is the nature of reality.²⁰ What exists is not being (substantial being) but just becoming. All mental and physical phenomena are mere aggregates of their parts; and these aggregates themselves are not permanent but always changing (cf. *Samyutta Nikaya* 22.48, 25.10).²¹ This would imply that things are not substances and are without any enduring self-identity.²² Since impermanence is the nature of reality and things are "without self-nature" (*nihilsvabhava*), Buddhism rules out the existence of all transcendent things, with their claims of endurance (cf. *Majjhima Nikaya* 1).

Coming to the no-self theory, Buddhism holds that due to impermanence of things no substantial self (soul), can exist. The self is only an assumed agent of our mental states (cf. *Digha Nikaya* 9, 15; cf. *Majjhima Nikaya* 11; *Samyutta Nikaya* 22.1,42,59). If there is no enduring self that survives death, what is it that transmigrates and gets embodied in the next birth? Buddhism would say that it is the aggregate of one's

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karmic dispositions that get embodied in the rebirth (*Majjhima Nikaya* 9; *Samyutta Nikaya* 12.2). According to Buddhism, when we act with desires we stock up dispositions (inclinations) and these dispositions get embodied as a new birth. To stop rebirth and achieve total cessation of suffering, one needs to blow out all desires, made possible by enlightenment achieved through meditation (*Anguttara Nikaya* 10.58; *Majjhima Nikaya* 1, 11, 72, 141; *Samyutta Nikaya* 12.65, 56.11; *Dhammapada* 1.1-2).

The third doctrine, the theory of dependent origination, states that the world is in a constant process of integration and disintegration of its units and there is no reality outside and beyond this process. This world process sustains itself by the universal law of causation. Things are causally connected, and a thing originates dependent on its antecedent cause (*Digha Nikaya* 15; cf. *Majjhima Nikaya* 28). For example, from birth as a prerequisite condition comes aging and death.²³ The world process goes on and on, based on this eternal law of dependent origination (cf. *Samyutta Nikaya* 12.44). Thus for Buddhism all that exists is process.

1.3. Vaisheshika Pluralism

Buddhism set in motion fresh debates among philosophers of ancient India.²⁴ Indeed, the challenge posed by the Buddhist process metaphysics was an important factor in the formation of all post-Buddhist schools - Vaisheshika, Nyaya,²⁵ Mimamsa,²⁶ and Vedanta. Regarding the origin of Vaisheshika (also

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spelled Vaisesika), Radhakrishnan, for instance, says that the philosophical impulse of this school “is derived from its hostility to Buddhistic phenomennalism” (Radhakrishnan 1951: 177).²⁷

Vaisheshika expounded substance pluralism as against the Buddhist processism.²⁸ The primary text of this school is *Vaisheshikasutra* (“Vaisheshika Aphorisms”) of Kanada, who flourished in the third or second century BCE.²⁹ In our exposition of the Vaisheshika pluralism, we limit ourselves to the *Vaisheshikasutra* (hereafter VS).³⁰

Kanada set out his metaphysical pluralism in six fundamental categories of being. These ontological categories (*padarthas*) are: substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), activity (*karma*), the universal (*samanya*), particularity (*vishesha*), and inherence (*samavaya*) (VS 1.1.4).³¹

Substance is the most fundamental category, as substances are the only entities that can exist independently. Kanada lists nine basic substances: earth, water, fire, air, ether, time, space, self and mind (VS 1.1.5). These substances are eternal and are not created or annihilated, either by cause or by effect (cf. VS 1.1.12). It may be noted that earth, water, fire and air are eternal, not in their gross state but only in their elemental atoms (cf. VS 7.1.2). These atoms combine in various ways to form material bodies (cf. VS 4.2.5; 5.2.13). Like many ancients, Kanada seems to have believed that ether permeated all space and was the medium of sound (VS 2.1.27; 7.1.22). Regarding time and space, the former denotes the succession (before and after) of things (VS 2.2.6,9) and the latter their

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location (nearness and farness) (VS 2.2.10; 7.2.21). Coming to the self (*atma/atman*) and the mind (*manas*), Vaisheshika, like other classical schools, made a distinction between the two. While the self (soul) is the agent that knows the senses and their objects, mind is the instrument by which this knowing takes place (VS 3.1.2,19-20; 3.2.1,4; 9.1.11).³²

Substances are always characterized by quality and activity, and the characteristics (nature and function) of different substances depend on different qualities and activities they possess (VS 2.1.1-31; 2.2.1-16). Though quality and activity as categories are eternal, they do not have independent existence.³³ They exist as properties of substances.³⁴ Substances, qualities and actions interact to cause many effects. Some of the interacting causes are perceptible, but others are unseen causes. For example, freezing and melting of water is due to heat (fire), while circulation in trees is due to unseen cause (VS 5.2.7-8).

The universal (*samanya*) and particularity (*vishesha*) render identity to entities. Without these we wouldn't be able to organize the world and make any sense of it.³⁵ The universal (*samanya*) is the nature that is common to members of the same class, say cow-ness to cows. There is no cow without cow-ness inherent in it. The highest universal is being or existence (*satta*), and it is inherent in substances, qualities and activities and make them exist (VS 1.2.4,7,9,17).³⁶ Particularity (*vishesha*) constitutes the ultimate difference a thing has (VS 1.2.6), making it different from other members of the same class.³⁷ Each cow is different and unique because of the particularity it carries. It seems that for

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Kanada the universal and particularity, though they are real, do not exist independently of the objects where they inhere in (cf. VS 8.1.5-6).³⁸

The last category is inherence (*samavaya*). This category makes causality possible, for it is the co-inherence of cause and effect. “*Samavaya* is that by the virtue of which cause and effect may be said to be in one another” (VS 7.2.26). This doesn’t mean that the effect is pre-existent in the cause. Unlike Sankhya, Vaisheshika considers every effect to be something new, different from its cause.³⁹

Kanada’s ontology was naturalistic (non-theistic), as it explained the world without any reference to God. But the later Vaisheshikas introduced God into the Vaisheshika system. God makes his first arrival in Prashastapada (5th century CE).⁴⁰ This theistic turn was not so much for theoretical reason but for the practical reason of being accommodative to rising Hindu orthodoxy.⁴¹ The influence of contemporary Naiyayikas also cannot be ruled out.⁴² The Vaisheshika God however was not a creator God, but only an efficient cause who would organize and guide the already existing universe.

1.4. Vedantic Monism

The principal text of Vedanta⁴³ is the *Brahmasutra* (hereafter BS),⁴⁴ the authorship of which is traditionally attributed to Badarayana (2nd or 1st century BCE).⁴⁵ Counteracting the Sankhya dualism, the Buddhist processism and the Vaisheshika pluralism, Badarayana

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propounded an idealist substance monism based on the Upanishads.⁴⁶ According to the Upanishads, being is ultimately Brahman,⁴⁷ the Supreme Self, which manifests itself in the world of becoming and is to be known and experienced as one's own innermost self (*atman*).⁴⁸

For Badarayana, as for the authors of the Upanishads, Brahman is the origin and the intelligent guide of the world. "(Ultimate Reality is that) from which origin, etc. (i.e. subsistence and destruction) of this (would proceed)" (BS 1.1.2).⁴⁹ Brahman permeates all things and exists as their inner self (BS 1.1.22-24,29-30; 1.2.18; 2.3.13; 3.2.20,27) and intelligent support (BS 1.2.3; 1.3.10-11). Brahman is not only the origin but also the end of the world. "The eater (is the Highest Self) on account of taking in of (whatever is) movable and immovable" (BS 1.2.9). The world comes out of and is reabsorbed into Brahman (cf. BS 1.4.25; 2.3.14). So, Brahman originates, sustains and consumes the world.

The world does not have any ontological existence independent of and apart from Brahman. This is not because Brahman is the creator of the world, but creation itself is the causal Brahman becoming (*parinama*), or transforming itself into, the world of effects. The effect should pre-exist in the cause (BS 2.1.7-9, 14-15, 19). And hence Brahman is not only the efficient cause of the world, but its material cause as well (BS 1.4.23; 2.2.37). "(Brahman is the material cause) on account of action referring to itself. (This is possible) owing to transformation" (BS 1.4.26). Probably as clay transforms into things made of clay or gold becomes gold ornaments or milk turns into curd, Brahman

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modifies itself and assumes the form of the world (cf. BS 2.1.9; 2.1.24).⁵⁰

By conceiving Brahman as the material cause of the world, Badarayana left to the later Vedantins a big problem of explaining how the immaterial Brahman transforms itself into the material world, without losing its own identity (BS 2.1.4, 8-10, 26-27). Following the lead of Shankara (traditionally dated 788-820), Advaitins would say that the world is only an appearance (*vivarta*).⁵¹ On the contrary, Ramanuja (traditionally dated 1017-1137) and Vishishtadvaitins would argue that the world is coeternal with Brahman, the relation between the two being one of the body and the soul.⁵²

Another philosophical problem Badarayana left unsolved is the ontological identity of the individual self (*atman*). There are passages which state that the individual self is eternal and is never subject to birth or death (e.g. BS 2.3.16-17; cf. 1.3.19). This leads Advaitins to suppose absolute nonduality (*advaita*) between the individual self and the Supreme Self, Brahman.⁵³ But there are also passages which draw a distinction between *atman* and Brahman (e.g. BS 1.2.3, 8; 1.2.20; 1.3.5,42; 1.4.21-22; 2.1.22; 2.3.41,43,46,50). The distinction, however, is so thin that it is like the serpent and its coils (BS 3.2.27) or light and its substratum (fire) (BS 3.2.28); furthermore, in meditation, we experience the Supreme Self as our own inner self (BS 3.2.5; 4.1.3,5).

In explaining the mechanism of reincarnation, Badarayana adopted, probably from Sankhya, the concept of the subtle body. The subtle body (*sukshma-sharira*), which carries the karmic impressions,

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accompanies the individual self to the next life.⁵⁴ But, for those who have attained true knowledge of Brahman, all karmic merits and demerits stop to cling to them (BS 4.1.13-14) and they become one (inseparable) with Brahman (BS 3.2.26; 4.1.19; 4.4.4) and are totally released from transmigration (BS 4.2.22).⁵⁵

1.5. Rationale for Relationalism

For Sankhya, reality is ultimately two, as it consists of two distinct and separate categories of being, namely spirit and matter; for Buddhism, reality is a process, as things are momentary aggregates, originated interdependently and without any claim for ontological substantiality; for Vaisheshika, reality is pluralistic, as it consists of many categories of being and there exist irreducibly distinct substances; and for Vedanta, reality is fundamentally one, as the multiplicity of being is manifestation of the one Absolute Being.

As legitimate philosophical positions, the above discussed ontological views have their explanatory merits and can answer many of our questions on reality. So I am not proposing relationalism as a competing, alternative theory. I would rather prefer relationalism to be a perspective which is beyond monism, dualism, pluralism and processism. Let us examine these views first.

The difficulty any metaphysical dualism would face is to adequately explain how two completely different categories or substances can causally interact. In the case of Sankhya, it is the dualism between spirit and

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matter. There wouldn't be any trouble if we let these two, matter and spirit, operate in their own completely separate worlds. But that isn't the case. Sankhya presupposes some kind of interaction between the two. *Prakriti* exists and evolves for the sake of *purusha*, and *purusha*, until it attains total liberation, is entangled with *prakriti*. Moreover, *prakriti* and *purusha* jointly produce all phenomena, the former serving as the material cause and the latter as the efficient cause. Yet, Sankhya wants to keep its absolute dualism of categories.⁵⁶ No genuine categorial interaction can be accounted for unless we bring the categories into a coherent system, making them interconnected components of that system. Unlike dualism, relationalism allows categories to bear on one another, thanks to certain ontological essentials that they all share.

Processism accords ontological primacy to process over substance (particular). On the Buddhist view, no entities can claim any kind of substantivity, as they are only recurrent confluence of components, lacking a self-nature. Both entities and their relations are subordinated to a universal causal flux. To put it differently, all plurality is negated or is reduced to a unity, which is also denied a self-nature. So, from the perspective of processism, the world is a single process to which particulars are subjected as participants, but at the end, particulars themselves lose their ontological claims and dissolve in the process. Thus process becomes the very essence of reality. The problem which Buddhism and any other processism face is how they can account for process itself. Process is action and

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action cannot exist without an agent to act. Just as there cannot be a dance without people dancing, there cannot be process without objects acting. Unlike processism, relationalism recognizes that events and relations cannot occur without some continuants (entities with some enduring existence and identity) as agents.

Pluralism is an attractive theory, since it realistically represents the world of our everyday experience. We experience that there exist not only many entities but also many categories of entities. Vaisheshika does a superb job of analyzing the world and categorizing its furniture. These categories of being, according to Vaisheshika, are eternal and they interact with one another and make one world. But Vaisheshika and similar forms of pluralism face the same problem which dualism faces, namely how categorial interaction can be possible. Of course, Vaisheshika speaks of *samavaya* (inherence) as connective ontological glue. But *samavaya* itself is presented as a separate category. If it is a separate category, what connects this category to other categories? Neither is the God of the later Vaisheshikas a real answer, because their God is only an efficient cause, lacking ontological sufficiency to bring about real interaction between diverse entities. Unlike pluralism, relationalism maintains that entities are ontologically open to one another due to certain ontological features they share. This ontological openness gives entities the possibility to interact and contribute towards the unity of the world.

Monism has always been an appealing theory, especially with idealist thinkers who would make a distinction between reality and appearance. For all

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monists, the real is deeper than what senses can meet. This search for the ultimately real reduces plurality to some universal oneness. Substance monism, whose fitting example Vedanta is, takes this ultimate reality to be a substance. For Vedanta this one substance is Brahman, the Supreme Self, which undergoes cosmic modifications (transformations) without sacrificing its identity as self. The difficulty of monism is to find an adequate explanation for the reality of the world. Even if we grant that the world of plurality we deal with every day may only be relatively real when compared with the truly real, the world and its plurality of entities is still a fact and this fact needs to be explained, rather than explained away. While pluralism finds it hard to explain the world's unity, monism finds it hard to explain its plurality. Unlike monism, relationalism tries to explain the unity of the world without sacrificing its plurality, because the unity it speaks of is the ontological unity of the pluralistic world.

I think it is possible to bring dualism under pluralism and treat it also as a form of pluralism, because dualism affirms the existence of more than one category of entity. Similarly, processes could be brought under monism and treated as a form of monism, say process monism. The only difference between process monism and substance monism is that the former posits reality ultimately as a process, whereas the latter posits it ultimately as a substance. Then there are only two basic positions, monism and pluralism. Consequently, relationalism, being an attempt to strike a delicate balance between the unity and the plurality of the world, can be seen as a perspective beyond monism and

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pluralism, and the problem it addresses is the ancient problem of the one and the many.

Notes

¹ In this regard, one may note that the paradigm suggested by classical Indian philosophizing is to state others' views first, before defending your own position. The views expounded by others would form the prior-view (*purvapaksha*) to your own view, which is the posterior-view (*uttarapaksha*).

² By selecting these schools, I don't make any claim for their exhaustiveness of the views they represent.

³ The term *Sankhya* (also spelled *Samkhya*), deriving from the verbal root *khyā* (to know) with the prefix *sam* (exact), etymologically means "exact knowledge." But it literally means "number." Some of the original ideas of Sankhya may have been pre-Vedic, and some of these Sankhya conceptions were absorbed into Vedic Hinduism at a very early period. Kapila, the systematic founder of Sankhya, must have organized these pre-Vedic and Vedic ideas into a system of thought. Contemporaneous with the pre-Vedic and Vedic proto-Sankhya, there might have existed an earlier form of Jainism, which Vardhamana Mahavira (6th or 5th century BCE) is thought to have organized into a religion. Similarly, Yoga also may have a pre-history when it existed as an atheistic discipline, until it was reformulated as a theistic school by Patanjali (2nd or 1st century BCE) in his *Yogasutra* ("Yoga Aphorisms"). Metaphysical dualism of spirit and matter, belief in reincarnation, and salvation as emancipation

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of spirit from matter were features common to these proto Sankhya, Yoga and Jainism. For a discussion of the pre-Vedic origins of Sankhya, Yoga and Jainism, see Joshi 1977: 32-36, 98-102, 118-21, 102, 134-35.

⁴ The existing *Sankhyasutra* ("Sankhya Aphorisms"), attributed to Kapila, is a spurious work of much later period, probably as late as fifteenth century. It makes its first appearance in Aniruddha's *Sankhyasutravritti* of the fifteenth century (see Dasgupta 1975: 222). It may also be noted that even for Madhava, the fourteenth century author of *Sarvadarshanasangraha* ("A Summary of All Philosophies"), the principal Sankhya authority was *Sankhyakarika*.

⁵ Though Ishvarakrishna claims that his work is a faithful summary of the doctrine handed down to him from Kapila through a succession of disciples (*Sankhyakarika* 69-71), there is no doubt that he elaborated and expanded it. While the key concepts of *purusha* and *prakriti* might go back to Kapila, the philosophy received its classical shape in Ishvarakrisna's *Sankhyakarika* after evolving over a period of many centuries and drawing on different traditions. So what we are going to talk about as Kapila's Sankhya is the Sankhya philosophy as expounded and systematized by Ishvarakrishna. Two important commentaries on the *Sankhyakarika* are Gaudapada's *Sankhyakarikabhashya* (6th century) and Vachaspatimishra's *Tattvakaumudi* (9th century).

⁶ Regarding the origin of the idea of reincarnation, we can only speculate. The pre-Vedic proto Sankhya and Jainism might have proposed it as an aetiological explanation of human suffering, attributing the cause of suffering in the present life to wrong doing in previous life. The origin of the

concept cannot be credited to Vedic Hinduism, because the Vedic hymns just don't mention it. The Rigvedic man prayed and offered sacrifices for long life and earthly prosperity and for immortality in that realm where all longing wishes are fulfilled (*Rig Veda* 9.113.11; 10.14.2; 10.15.7). But in the Upanishads, we find doctrine of rebirth well established (e.g., *Brihadaranyaka* 6.2; *Chandogya* 5.3-10). So, Hinduism must have accepted the concept of reincarnation from pre-Vedic proto Sankhya and Jainism during this interim period. According to both Sankhya and Jainism, ignorance of one's true self launches one into the cycle of birth and death, and the way to liberation is through discriminative knowledge. The Upanishads too accepted this Sankhya and Jain premise. The influence cannot have been in the opposite direction (i.e., Hinduism influencing Jainism and other Indian schools), for Buddhism, which set out to establish a school of thought side-stepping the Vedic authority altogether, also accepted the doctrine as part of its theory of dependent origination.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from Ishvarakrishna 1969.

⁸ *Purusha* and *prakriti* literally mean "person" and "nature" respectively. The Sankhya belief in the eternity of *purusha* is a pre-condition for its belief in reincarnation. Unless the souls pre-existed, they cannot become embodied; and if the soul can become embodied in this life, its embodiment in the past and in the future is a logical possibility. But we don't know what made Sankhya postulate the existence of the soul in the first place. As in many philosophies and religions, Sankhya also might have postulated the spiritual self to account for our mental states. Moreover, the desire for immortality is

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deep in the human psyche, as belief in afterlife helps people conquer the ultimate fear of death. So no culture is sparse in speculations on the kind of metaphysical mechanism that guarantees our continued existence.

⁹ Sankhya enumerates twenty-three evolutes (modifications) of *prakriti* (SK 22, 24-26). The following are these evolutes: cosmic intellect (*mahat*), cosmic ego (*ahamkara*), individual mind (*manas*), five individual sense-organs (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste), five individual motor organs (organs of speech, hand, leg, and digestive and reproductive organs), five subtle elements (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell), and five gross elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth).

¹⁰ The most important arguments for *satkaryavada* (the theory of pre-existence of the effect in the cause) are the non-productivity of non-being and the fact that something can produce only what it is capable of producing (SK 9).

¹¹ The concept of *gunas* was introduced perhaps to explain how *prakriti* can produce diverse modifications. "(In the) upper (world) (there is) a predominance of *sattva*. (In the) lower creation (there is) a predominance of *tamas*. In the middle, (there is) a predominance of *rajas*. (This is so) from Brahma down to a blade of grass" (SK 54). It may be interesting to note that for Sankhya gods also belong to the created order.

¹² However, this association or proximity is so close that the unconscious *prakriti* "appears as if characterized by consciousness" and the inactive *purusha* "appears as if characterized by activity" (SK 20).

¹³ Sankhya establishes the plurality of *purushas* because of the diversity of birth, death and actions (SK 18). Because there is

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infinite number of *purushas*, there is infinite possibility of modifications for *prakriti*.

¹⁴ An alternative translation of this verse (SK 55) reads: “There (in the world of men) the sentient (or intelligent) soul experiences pain arising from old age and death until the *linga* has ceased to be ...” (Ishvarakrishna 1957).

¹⁵ At least by the time of Vachaspatimishra (9th century), Sankhya came to accept the Yoga system of Patanjali as the practical means to achieve this discriminative knowledge.

¹⁶ *Prakriti* says to herself “‘I have been seen’ and never again comes into the sight of *purusha*” (SK 61). In other words, the attitude of the liberated *purusha* will be “‘I have seen (her)’ and of *prakriti*, ‘I have been seen’” (SK 66).

¹⁷ Scholars had placed the Buddha’s death c. 480 BCE. But today many scholars bring this date forward by approximately a century, to a date c. 380 BCE (see Bechert 1991-1997).

¹⁸ In Sanskrit *anitya*, *anatma* and *pratitya-samutpada* respectively.

¹⁹ The Pali canon consists of three collections of Pali texts: *Vinaya Pitaka* (monastic rules), *Sutta Pitaka* (discourses attributed to the Buddha and his early disciples), and *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (doctrinal expositions). Although tradition holds that the Council called by emperor Ashoka fixed this canon, it did not receive its final form not until the first century BCE.

²⁰ In later Buddhism, the concept of impermanence led to the development of the theory of momentariness (*kshanika-vada*), which states that everything is in a flux and things exist moment by moment.

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²¹ The human being, for example, is an aggregate of five groups of aggregates: body, sensations, perceptions, dispositions and consciousness (*Samyutta Nikaya* 22.48, 25.10).

²² Later, the Madhyamika school, following the lead of Nagarjuna (c. 150-200 CE), would hold that all phenomena are “empty” (*shunya*), as they are devoid of any “self-nature” (*svabhava*). A thing is without a substantial nature, for its existence is dependent on other things which originate it.

²³ The classic example of dependent origination is the Buddhist explanation of the human becoming (e.g. *Samyutta Nikaya* 12.2; *Majjhima Nikaya* 9): From ignorance originate actions with desires and consequent karmic dispositions; from these karmic depositions originate the consciousness of the potential individual; from this consciousness originates the actual individual; from the actual individual originate six senses (five senses and mind); from these senses originates sense-object contact; from this sense-object contact originate sensations; from sensations originate desires; from desires originates clinging to life; from clinging to life originates becoming (tendency to be born); from becoming originates birth; and from birth originate old age and death (suffering).

²⁴ Ashoka’s (reign c. 265-238 BCE; also given as c. 273-232 BCE) patronage of Buddhism made the new movement more popular, and this gave philosophers added necessity to engage it.

²⁵ Nyaya (“Logical Reasoning”) is Vaisheshika’s sister school. Gautama of the first or second century BCE is thought to have founded Nyaya. His *Nyayasutra* (“Nyaya Aphorisms”) treats perception, inference, comparison and testimony as valid means to arrive at true knowledge. As early as

Prashastapada, the fifth century author of *Padarthadharmasamgraha* (hereafter PDS), and Uddyotakara, the sixth-century author of *Nyayavartika*, the philosophers of Vaisheshika and Nyaya schools used each other's doctrines. And, by the time of Udayana (10th century), who wrote *Kiranavali*, a commentary on PDS, and Shridhara (10th century), who wrote *Nyayakandali*, yet another commentary on PDS, Vaisheshika and Nyaya had almost merged to form one school, Nyaya-Vaisheshika.

²⁶ Mimamsa ("Inquiry") was a system of hermeneutics, developed for proper interpretation of the Vedic texts and rituals. The most authoritative text of this school is Jaimini's *Mimamsasutra* (composed between 300 and 100 BCE).

²⁷ "While the Vaisesika accepts the Buddhist view of the sources of knowledge, perception and inference, it argues that souls and substances are solid facts ..." (Radhakrishnan 1951: 177).

²⁸ But this in no way denies the possible pre-Buddhist existence of some earlier strand of substance pluralism, which Vaisheshika probably incorporated. Dasgupta (1975: 280-81), for example, supposes that the *Vaisheshikasutra* represents elements of an older school of Mimansa. But scholars like him (1975: 281) and Thakur (2003: 9) believe that Vaisheshika knew little of Buddhism, as there is no reference to Buddhist doctrines in the *Vaisheshikasutra*. Though Buddhism is not mentioned by name, the fact of the Sutra making a detailed analysis of how we know the existence of the self is a clear indication that it wanted to establish the substantiality of the self against some prevalent non-substantialist view (VS 3.2.6,10-20). For Kanada, the existence

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of the self can be inferred primarily through our self-awareness, the awareness that I am so-and-so and that I am the agent of knowing, different from the senses and their objects (VS 3.1.2; 3.2.10,14-18).

²⁹ Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (3rd century BCE) listed only Sankhya, Yoga and Lokayata (Charvaka) among philosophies (*anvikshiki*). This may be an indication that Vaisheshika, like Vedanta and Nyaya, must not have existed as established philosophical schools before the third century BCE. The earliest external reference to Vaisheshika may be found in the Buddhist Abhidharma literature of the first or second century CE, while the medical text, *Charaka Samhita*, again of the first or second century CE, seems to presuppose some Vaisheshika concepts (see King 1999: 58; Dasgupta 1975: 280-81).

³⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from Kanada 2003.

³¹ Although Kanada discussed how we perceive the non-existence (*asat*) of things (VS 9.1.1-10), neither he nor Prashastapada considered it an ontological category. But in the course of time, Vaisheshikas like Udayana and Shridhara (10th century) added "absence" (*abhava*) to the list, making the total number of basic categories to be seven. Absence was added perhaps to make sense of negative statements (cf. Phillips 1995:50).

³² Unlike Sankhya and Vedanta, Vaisheshika seems to hold that the self is unconscious in itself and it becomes conscious by its conjunction with the senses and the mind.

³³ Colour, taste, smell, touch, number, size, distinctness, conjunction, disjunction, nearness, remoteness, cognition,

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pleasure, pain, desire, hate, volition, etc. are the qualities (VS 1.1.6). The later Vaisheshikas interpreted *etc.* as meaning sound, weight, fluidity, viscosity, speed, merit and demerit, and thus made the total number of qualities to be twenty-four. Activities are five: upward movement, downward movement, contraction, expansion and locomotion (VS 1.1.7).

³⁴ “(Having) actions, *gunas* and (being) coinherent cause are the characteristics of *dravya*” (VS 1.1.15). Qualities reside (inhere) in substances (VS 1.1.15-17; 2.2.23). We know substances through their properties (VS 8.1.4).

³⁵ “(Cognition of) *dravya*, *guna*, and *karma* presupposes the *samanya* and the *visesa*” (VS 8.1.6).

³⁶ “By which *dravya*, *guna* and *karma* appear to be existent, that is *satta*” (VS 1.2.7).

³⁷ Everything, except being (*satta*), has its *vishesha* (VS 1.2.17).

³⁸ *Samanya* and *vishesha* are not directly perceived, but are inferred by the intellect (VS 1.2.3).

³⁹ “In the absence of the interaction of *kriya* and *gunas*, before coming into being (an effect is said to be) non-existent” (VS 9.1.1).

⁴⁰ Prashastapada’s *Padarthadharmaśamgraha* (“Summary of Inquiry on Categories”).

⁴¹ It may be noted that the *Yuktidipika*, a Sankhya work of the sixth or early seventh century CE by an unknown author, says that Vaisheshika accepted God from the Pashupatas (Pashupata Shaivites).

⁴² God was introduced into Gautama’s non-theistic Nyaya by the later Nayayikas, starting with Vatsyayana (4th or 5th century CE), the author of *Nyayabhashya*. Gautama’s *Nyayasutra* (hereafter NS) makes a reference to God in sutra

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4.1.19. But this was in the context of refuting an argument that God is the guarantor of the efficacy of human actions (NS 4.1.19-21).

⁴³ Vedanta means “end of the Veda.” The school is known so, because its basic doctrines are derived from the Upanishads, which make the end part of the Vedic scriptures.

⁴⁴ *Brahmasutra* (“Aphorisms on Brahman”) is also known as *Vedantasutra*. All quotations are from Radhakrishnan 1960.

⁴⁵ In several of his *sutras* the author of the *Brahmasutra* relies on the authority of Badarayana (e.g., BS 1.3.26,33; 3.2.41; 3.4.1,8,19), and this makes the authorship hard to settle. Nakamura (1983: 406), for example, opines: “In the *Brahmasutra*, since there is frequent mention of the theories of Badarayana as authority for his own theories, the *Sutra*-author must have lived after Badarayana.”

⁴⁶ Badarayana resurrected the meditative tradition of the Upanishads arguably as a response to Buddhism in kind. For Vedanta, as for Buddhism, liberation is through meditative knowledge rather than religious rituals (see BS 3.3.25,42; 3.4.1,12,25-27,52; 4.4.12).

⁴⁷ Notwithstanding its ritualistic polytheism, the Rig Veda (1200-800/700 BCE), in some of its later hymns (e.g. RV 1.164.46; 10.82, 121, 129), contained the idea of the “One” (*Ekam*) as the “maker of the universe” (*vishvakarman*) and the “lord of creatures” (*prajapati*). By the time the Upanishads came to be written (600-300 BCE), the “One” came to be called *Brahman*, meaning “Great” or “Absolute.”

⁴⁸ According to the Upanishads, Brahman is the real of the real, out of which all things came out, like the thread coming out of the spider (*Brihadaranyaka* 2.1.20), and is the intelligent

guide of the world (*Aitareya* 3.5.3; *Shvetashatara* 6.1.2). The Upanishads also conceived of Brahman as the inner principle, i.e. the *atman* (soul or self), of the world. The eloquent imagery is that Brahman created the universe and then entered into it as its soul, thus becoming both the formed and the formless at the same time (*Taittiriya* 2.6). As self (*atman*), Brahman is present in the whole world, very much as salt is present everywhere in the saline water yet unperceived (*Chandogya* 6.13.1-2). And, those who know Brahman as their true self have Brahman as their only desire and obtain the blissful union with Brahman (*Brihadaranyaka* 1.4.10; 4.4.6; *Taittiriya* 2.1; 2.5; 3.6; *Chandogya* 3.14.4; 6.13.3; *Mandukya* 2;7).

Instead of the impersonal term *Brahman*, some of the later Upanishads prefer the more “personal” term *Ishvara* (the Lord or God). The only Lord rules over the material world and the individual selves (*Shvetashatara* 1.3; 1.10); He leads the individual selves finally to their liberation from rebirth (*Katha* 2.20; *Mundaka* 3.2.1).

⁴⁹ See also BS 1.2.22; 1.3.1; 1.4.2-3, 14, 27; 3.3.16.

⁵⁰ Badarayana attributes no motive to *Brahman* in creating the world, except that it is as natural for *Brahman* to create, as it is natural for us to engage in sports. “But, as in ordinary life, creation is mere sport (to *Brahman*)” (BS 2.1.33).

⁵¹ Although Shankara himself did not use the term *vivarta*, the idea was implied in his concept of superimposition (*adhyasa*) (*Brahmasutrabhashya* 1.1.1; 3.3.9). According to Shankara, the world is only relatively real (i.e. ultimately unreal), produced by Brahman’s power of illusion (*maya*).

⁵² For Ramanuja, individual selves and material world together form the body (*sharira*) of Brahman, either as subtle

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body in the unmanifest stage or as gross body in the manifest stage (*Shribhasya* 1.1.1, 1.4.27, 2.3.18).

⁵³ According to Advaitins, what is subject to ignorance and rebirth is not our transcendent self (*atman*) but our empirical self (*jiva*) which is part of the “illusory” world.

⁵⁴ “(The soul) goes (out of the body) enveloped (by subtle material elements) with a view to obtaining a different (body)” (BS 3.1.1). On subtle body, see also BS 3.1.27; 4.2.8-11.

⁵⁵ The released souls possess all qualities of *Brahman*, except the power of creation (BS 4.4.17).

⁵⁶ The theories of occasionalism (Malebranche) and pre-established harmony (Leibniz), though inadequate, offer some kind of solution. To make the mental states and events occur in exact parallel with the physical states and events, the exponents of these theories can bring in God as causal agent. But Sankhya cannot afford this, for there is absolutely no place for God in its scheme of things.

2

Phenomenology of Relationality

As I argued in my earlier works (Kaipayil 2002, 2003, 2008), a metaphysical or ontological theory can have epistemological justification only if it is a “critical” theory, that is to say, it should be based on empirical experience. Ontology and metaphysics cannot be some fancy *a priori* speculation. For this reason, it is necessary to establish the epistemic justification (reasonableness) of relationalism, before I can move on to any further discussion of a relationalist account of being. Hence a brief phenomenology of relationality follows.¹

The different forms of relationality (relatedness of reality) we experience can broadly be divided into: phenomenal relationality, epistemological relationality and ethical relationality. By phenomenal relationality, I mean the relationality we find in the physical world, the relationality of physical entities; by epistemological relationality, I mean the relationality we experience in our knowing process; and by ethical relationality, I mean the relationality of our social existence. Each of these three forms of relationality will display that reality is a plurality and a unity at the same time; or rather, reality is a unity of plurality.

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2.1. Phenomenal Relationality

Science is the best available description of the physical world, and metaphysics should be practised in continuity with physics (science). That said, it does not mean that the content and cognitive terminus of metaphysics are settled by science, as some philosophers want us to believe (e.g., Ladyman 2007: 309-310).² Metaphysics puts to philosophical reflection the information it gathers from science, just as it does with any other empirical experience.

Given the enormity and complexity of science, it is just impossible to engage all of it here. So I select relativity and quantum mechanics, the two theories of modern physics which touched the very basis of physical reality and altered much of how we perceive the world today.

The theory of relativity states that the laws of physics are the same for all observers in uniform motion.³ In other words, reality appears basically the same if you use the same standard of measurement. The philosophical implication is that there must be some inherent unity of reality which makes the working of the world appear the same, or at least similar, to all perceivers who use the same tool of measurement.

Other relativistic notions, such as mass-energy convertibility, unification of space and time as spacetime continuum, and interpretation of gravitation in terms of spacetime curvature around massive bodies, do further demonstrate the unity of physical reality.

According to the theory of relativity, therefore, the concepts of bodily objects, space and time are connected

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together and contribute towards a single concept of the physical world as a spacetime continuum. This gives the prospect of a unified theory, the theory of everything that would account for all known features of the physical world. Finding such a theory of everything is the dream of every physicist! Hawking, for example, hopes that since everything in the universe depends on everything else in a fundamental way and the universe is not arbitrary but is governed by definite laws, there can be a complete unified theory (1997: 12-13).

While the theory of relativity did demonstrate the inescapable unity of reality, quantum theory has demonstrated the irreducible plurality of reality. The world is not a single chunk, one extended substance. This means, the basic material of the universe is not some uniform, undifferentiated, infinitely divisible stuff. On the contrary, the world is a plurality and the material of the world comes in individual particles. These fundamental particles provide the basic units that make up all matter and energy in the universe.⁴ Scientists have discovered many such fundamental particles, the best known being quarks, leptons and bosons. Quarks make up protons and neutrons, which in turn make up the nucleus of an atom. Leptons include electrons, the negatively charged particles that surround the nucleus of an atom.⁵ Bosons carry the four basic forces in the universe.⁶

According to the standard model of particle physics, atoms are made up of electrons, protons and neutrons, and protons and neutrons are composed of smaller particles known as quarks, which in turn are bound by gluons. But the odd thing is that the mass of gluons is

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zero and the mass of quarks is only about five per cent, leaving the vast remainder of an atom's mass to be explained. In 2008, a team of researchers led by Laurent Lellouch of France's Centre for Theoretical Physics has shown that the missing mass reside in the energy associated with the subatomic particles' motions and interactions.⁷ This in turn illustrates that everything in nature interacts someway with everything else and the physical world cannot exist except as a unity of interacting individuals.

The unity and plurality of physical reality is also indicated by the so-called string theory, which aims to unify relativity and quantum mechanics.⁸ String theories speculate that absolutely everything in the universe, i.e. all of the particles that make up matter and forces, is comprised of tiny vibrating strings. All strings are thought to be identical and one-dimensional. But they vibrate in different patterns. This vibrational pattern determines what kind of particle the string is. One pattern makes it a quark, for example, while another makes it a photon.⁹

Unity and plurality are the features of the physical world. This is the picture of the world, which relativity and quantum theories together present. What we can derive from this fact about the world is that physical reality is relational in virtue of its unity and plurality. If the world were one single substance, the world wouldn't be relational, for relation can exist only if there are two things to relate. If there didn't exist some innate unity of nature, the world wouldn't be relational either, for isolated things cannot relate. Two things can relate only when there is something common between

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them. Because things in the world have many common features, like mass, energy, charge, spatiotemporality, etc., they can relate and make one world.

2.2. Epistemological Relationality

Knowledge is relational, because knowledge is the result of interaction between the knower and the known. This makes knowledge relational both in its origin and in its three existential aspects, namely belief, consciousness and truth.

How is knowledge relational in its origin? All human knowledge has its origin in sense experience. The sensory stimuli are carried to the brain where that information is interpreted to make sense of it. In other words, the brain organizes the sensory information into concepts, and through these concepts we make sense of the objects of our sense perception. We articulate these concepts in words and make meaningful statements about the external world.¹⁰ This shows that knowledge is possible due to our sensory interaction with the world. Even as knowledge is not limited to empirical knowledge, no knowledge is possible without its basis in empirical experience. Hence knowledge by nature is *a posteriori* and not *a priori*. This applies even to apparently *a priori* sciences, mathematics and logic. We know the world not because mathematics and logic are out there *a priori*, ready for us to apply them to understand the world. Rather, it is because the world is out there and we have the practical need to understand and handle it. So we devised mathematical and logical

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tools.¹¹ Once these tools are in place, we can apply them *a priori* to understand the complex structures of the world.

Knowledge is relational in its belief aspect, for a belief is always a belief about some thing. My knowledge of an object comes to me in terms of my beliefs about it. An object may have more to it than our beliefs make of it. But the predicament is such that we cannot know an object, except as what we make of it through our beliefs.

In order for a belief to be knowledge, it should be a justified belief. That is to say, belief should be justified by the object. Otherwise the belief is false knowledge. My knowledge that the tiger is India's national animal is my belief about the tiger, for example. This belief that the tiger is the national animal of India should be founded on the tiger's states of affairs that it is India's national animal. Suppose someone says, "The tiger is *not* India's national animal." That statement is also a belief about the tiger. But that belief fails to be knowledge for not being justified by the fact about the tiger that it is India's national animal. So beliefs should represent, if not correspond to, the features (facts) of the object. In other words, belief should be relational not only to the object in general but its particular features as well.

Knowledge is relational also in its consciousness (awareness) aspect, because, consciousness, as in the case of belief, is always consciousness of some thing. Consciousness has two levels: consciousness of objects (object-consciousness)¹² and consciousness of oneself or self-consciousness. When I know a thing, I become

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conscious of that thing. This is not belief. Beliefs are thoughts about the object I am conscious of. I become conscious of an object the moment it becomes the object of my knowledge. I cannot formulate beliefs about a thing unless I am aware of it as the object of my knowledge. Regarding self-consciousness, it is only through my consciousness of objects that I become self-conscious. When I am conscious of the object, I become self-conscious that I am the knower, that I exist and I know.¹³

Finally, knowledge is relational in its truth dimension. Truth belongs to belief, for truth is our acceptance of a belief to be the case about the object. Since beliefs are often articulated in statements or propositions, we may say truth is a property of the proposition. And since beliefs and propositions are about some thing, truth relates to reality, without being identified with it.

It is possible to have multiple beliefs about one and the same object; each of these beliefs can be true, provided its claim has justification in the facts about the object. But the problem is how we can know the facts about an object in order to determine whether a belief relates to a fact it refers to. First of all, we should admit that reality is complex and that there is more to it than our descriptions of it. Secondly, we need to accept that each of our descriptions or beliefs is indeed an interpretation of the object under consideration and hence a limited representation of that object.¹⁴ Thirdly, it is important to recognize poly-alethism that the truth about an object can be manifold.

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Poly-alethism, or manifoldness of truth, does not entail alethic relativism. It only means that truth is perspectival, as we can have many perspectives on a thing. The validity or truth claim of a perspective depends on how faithfully it describes the essential properties of the object.¹⁵ Unlike poly-alethism, mono-alethism absolutises one perspective as the only perspective and that one perspective as the only truth. Make no mistake, poly-alethism leads to tolerance and respect for differences, while mono-alethism leads to intolerance and negation of differences.

What we said above about the origin and nature of knowledge leads us to believe that knowledge involves three terms: the knower and the known and knowledge. Knowledge is possible only if there exist the knower and the known, and knowledge results from their interaction.

2.3. Ethical Relationality

The two classic views as to the origin of ethics are: the Humean sentimentalism and the Kantian rationalism. The Humean view is that empathy, i.e. our ability to sympathize with others, is the source of morality. The Kantian view, on the contrary, sees the origin of ethics in our rational ability to know right and wrong. It is hard to choose one over the other, for reason and emotion are not mutually exclusive when it comes to moral choices.

But the limitation I find with both views is that they make the basis of ethics subjective, either your feeling

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or your judgment. Ethics is much more than feelings; ethics is much more than just rights and wrongs. Ethics is fundamentally your respect and care for the other. To put it differently, the reason for ethics is the other person in virtue of his or her being a human being. Ethics kicks in when I encounter the other. The reason why I should respect and care about others is that they are just human beings, that they are beings like me, with thoughts, feelings and decisions. So ethics is through and through relational. It is all about human beings relating to each other, respectfully and caringly. Yes, if we are innately ethical by virtue of empathy (Hume) or/and moral intelligence (Kant), that makes it easy for us to be ethically relational.

As I mentioned above, ethics kicks in when two human beings meet, necessitating both to treat each other with respect and care. To treat someone with respect and care means two things. Negatively, it means not to hurt the other; positively, it means to promote the other's flourishing (well-being). It is because of this ethical trust, the trust that human beings will treat one another ethically, that humans can enter into social relations and fashion social institutions. This takes us to the next point, namely societal relationality.

As with ethics, the human being is the reason for society to exist. As no human being is self-sufficient, humans need other humans to flourish. So individuals come together with a "collective intentionality" (Searle 1995: 25) to create a social structure for mutual protection. It is assumed that people cooperate in this process with freedom and equality (cf. Rawls 1993: 19). When people come together as free and equal members

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in a dialogical process, it will lead to the creation of a democratic society where individuals can continue to be free and equal. Only in a genuine democracy can individuals flourish, as democracy is committed to freedom and equality (cf. Kaipayil 2003:53-54).

A true democracy is a liberal democracy where the ontological primacy of the individual is affirmed.¹⁶ Liberal democracy is one that respects and protects the individual's civil liberties, personal freedoms and human rights in its social and political deliberations; liberal democracy is one that allows pluralism of thought and choice.¹⁷ Only a liberal democracy can tolerate pluralism. Without this liberal feature, democracy will deteriorate into either totalitarianism or majoritarianism. In totalitarianism, the regime determines what people should do; and in majoritarianism, the majority determines what the minorities should do. The individual freedoms and rights are at stake in either scenario.

A liberal democracy cannot but be a secular democracy. In a secular democracy, state sponsors no religion, even as it protects the religious freedom of its people. Religious people have the right that their voice be heard in political discourse, but religious beliefs cannot dictate political decisions. State, as an institution that caters to the protection of all and each of its citizenry, has the obligation to see that no religion negate the individual's basic liberties and rights.

Finally, a genuine democracy is a welfare democracy. A welfare democracy is one which sees its ultimate objective as the welfare (well-being) of all people. Policies and programmes should be such that

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they provide peace and prosperity to all, not collectively, but individually. This doesn't mean that it is the duty of the government to run businesses to deliver goods and services to people. The primary function of the government is regulatory. Its job is to see that mechanisms are in place that the country develops and that the fruits of such development reach people.

Democracies cannot remain in isolation, because their commitment is to the welfare of the individual. Despite their cultural differences, human beings are ontologically the same everywhere, and their worth and dignity transcends cultures and regions. People are becoming increasingly aware of their common humanity and are considering themselves citizens of the global human community. Additionally, the world has become indispensably inter-dependent. Peace, prosperity, and human development and security have become impossible without international co-operation.

Just as individuals make a state, states make the world community. But unlike individuals, individual states don't have ontological priority. Even in the world community, it is the individual that calls the ontological shots. Hence, the ultimate aim of the world community should be to ensure the individual's well-being. This is simply the reason why the international community cannot afford to leave the issues of basic freedoms and human rights to individual countries to decide; the well-being of the individual is the reason why countries should cooperate to combat disease, poverty, terrorism and violence; the human being is the reason why countries must come together to protect the earth and to explore space for the benefit of all.

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What are we to make of all what we said thus far about ethics and society? It discloses the relational make-up of both ethics and society. Ethics and society is the product of individuals in interaction. If individuals fail to acknowledge their ethical and societal relationality, the result will be unfettered libertarianism which disregards the common good in the name of the individual good; if the community fails to acknowledge the ontological primacy of the individual, the result will be unfettered communitarianism which de-faces individuals by denying their identities and conferring on them a collective identity. Both situations are unacceptable. Maybe, what we need is the relationalist interpretation of the individual and the community, rather than interpreting the individual in terms of the community or the community in terms of the individual.

Notes

¹ The term “phenomenology” is used here to mean a descriptive account of how things (phenomena) are, as they are given to our experience.

² “We need a metaphysics that goes beyond reporting science in order to address the unsettled questions and evaluate the presuppositions” (Sider 2008:5).

³ Since everything in the universe is moving, we cannot take any object as absolute frame of reference to base all other motion. All motion is relative to your frame of reference. But the laws of physics should hold true for all frames of reference. This dictated that the measured speed of light must be the same in all inertial frames of reference. Consequently,

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the speed of light has been considered the fundamental constant of nature.

⁴ These particles are called elementary or fundamental particles, as they cannot be broken down any further (at least in ordinary circumstances). Each lepton and quark has an antiparticle partner, with the same mass but opposite charge. When a particle and its antiparticle meet, they annihilate each other, creating a tiny burst of energy.

⁵ A team of physicists from the Universities of Cambridge and Birmingham recently discovered that electrons can, indeed, divide into two new particles called spinons and holons when crowded into in a narrow wire (*Science* 31 July 2009; *ScienceDaily* July 31, 2009).

⁶ Electromagnetism, strong force and weak force are carried by photons, gluons and weak gauge bosons (W and Z bosons) respectively. In quantum field model, gravitation is mediated by gravitons, instead of being described in terms of curved spacetime as in general relativity. But gravitons are yet to be observed in an experiment.

⁷ See “Einstein’s mass-energy relation,” in Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2009, available:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/181422/Einst-eins-mass-energy-relation>

⁸ No part of string theory has ever been experimentally confirmed, though.

⁹ In order for the string theory to explain the kinds of particles observed in nature, the strings need to vibrate in more than four dimensions. One of the hurdles string theories face is how they can reconcile these extra dimensions with the four known dimensions of the physical world.

¹⁰ Concepts or thoughts are chronologically anterior to words and language. It has been observed that “when a child wants to express an idea, he or she searches for words, and in doing so those words become functional elements of his or her thought” (UNESCO 2007: 9).

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¹¹ Mathematical entities are conceptual entities we have devised to count, measure and classify things. Similarly, the inferential structures which logic employs are, in the final analysis, our conceptualizations of the order and sequential connections of things we find in the world. Neither mathematical entities nor logical structures are ontologically real; they are real only by virtue of their conceptual representation of the world. The classical Indian logic, Nyaya, emphasized the “material” aspect of logic by requiring the major premise be supplemented with at least one example to show its basis in reality.

¹² Object-consciousness includes both our awareness of the external world and awareness of our subjective experiences like feeling, emotions and thoughts.

¹³ Consciousness does not exist on its own, for it exists only as consciousness of a subject (knower). I am afraid Vijnanavada Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta have an inflated view of consciousness that consciousness can exist on its own and that reality is ultimately pure consciousness, devoid of any subject-object duality.

¹⁴ It may be noted in this regard that science used to claim certainty of its descriptions, until the quantum uncertainty (indeterminacy) principle knocked down certainty criterion and replaced it with probability. The uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics states that it is impossible to specify simultaneously the position and momentum of an elementary particle. Elementary particles behave both as a particle and as a wave, and because of their wave and particle properties, we can calculate only how likely a particle will be in a certain position at a certain time.

¹⁵ Humans, from a biological point of view, share similar cognitive apparatus and hence it is possible to reach a comfortable agreement, if not consensus, about what we conceive of the world and how we can interact with it for practical purposes. After all, modern science happily

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conducts its daily business with the assumption that the laws of physics are the same for all observers in uniform motion.

¹⁶ The individual has the ontological primacy over the community, as the community is constituted of and by individuals. If individuals disappear, the community disappears too.

¹⁷ One form of intolerance to pluralism which society always faced and still continues to face is religious fundamentalism. It is absurd that people can divide and hate people in the name of religion. Religion should be a force that can bring people together for the sake of their common humanity. All religions believe in the inviolability of human life. If that is the case, it is simply absurd to hurt any human being in the name of religion, for whatever reason.

3

Ontic Relationalism

Philosophy is primarily a theoretical endeavour, notwithstanding its practical implications. Because of its theoretical nature, practically all philosophy is done through concepts. As Stroll (2009: 215) remarks, all philosophical problems, especially metaphysical problems, are essentially conceptual in nature.¹

In its conceptual explorations of reality, metaphysics is akin to theoretical physics. A theoretical physicist constructs her theory of the physical world by laying out basic concepts of physical things and their properties. These concepts are so basic that they cannot be reduced any further. The “basicness” of these concepts requires their simplicity and parsimony. So they should be “as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience” (Einstein 1934). Similarly, a metaphysician constructs her theory of reality using the requisite minimum number of basic concepts (cf. Kaipayil 2008: 19). In the following sections, I make a modest attempt at a relationalist theory of being, laid out in a few basic

concepts, viz. being, reality, particular, property, relation and Being-principle.

3.1. Being and Reality

The question of being pertains to existence of things. But, why should there be things in the first place? To put it differently, why is there something rather than nothing? Well, the simple answer is: there is something (at least one who asked this question) and something cannot come out of nothing, for nothing comes out of nothing, and hence something must be there always. This something, which can be any thing, is called being.

Being is the most obvious and yet the most obscure and puzzling of all philosophical concepts. It is most obvious because being is everywhere around us and we ourselves are being. When we think, we think of being; when we act, we act on being. On the other hand, being is obscure, defying any definition of it. Philosophers in East and West have taken it in so many different ways and have come up with different answers to the question of being. This elusiveness of being keeps ontology lively.

Can we humans avoid the question of being? No, we cannot. Not because we are fascinated by this exotic stuff, but because it pops up as soon as we start to think. So we cannot avoid the question of being. If we avoid it, we will be avoiding our own being; self-avoidance is impossible. Also, if we avoid it, we will be avoiding the object of our thought and action; we cannot think or act without some being as the object of our thinking and doing. We exist, we think and we act

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on account of being. So the question of being will always be with us.

What I said above does not make a case for arguing that being is mysterious, as some philosophers in the past wanted to make of it. I believe there is nothing mysterious about being, for the reason that it is a concept without a content of its own. It is ontologically an empty concept, because there exists no being as such. Any thing can become its content, because anything that exists is being. Being, therefore, is not the being of beings, some abstract “to-be” of things. Instead, being is any thing that exists. Now, to exist is to exist as a particular thing, as an entity with some identity. So being is always a particular being, say this particular man or that particular horse. “Being,” in the end, is a term we apply to any particular entity that exists or we take to exist.

What, then, is reality? Like being, reality is also an empty concept, a concept with no content of its own. Like being, its content is also provided by things that exist. So, “reality,” like “being,” is a term we apply to things that exist. The main difference is that the term being refers mainly to individual things, whereas the term reality can mean all things taken together as a totality (cf. Kaipayil 1995: 4 n.10). Going by this distinction, we can say beings make reality. But still what exists are particular beings.

Given that being has existence only as particular beings, the question of being boils down to the question of particulars. Particulars have their identities because of properties. This leads to conversations on particular and property.

3.2. Particular and Property

There is no experience or thought which are not related to some objects. These objects of our experience and thought are broadly of two kinds: actual objects and conceptual objects. Actual objects are things that exist in actuality. They are commonly called particulars or individuals. Conceptual objects are products of our thought and are commonly called ideas. Ideas do not have any independent existence, as they exist as ideas of some thinking particulars, who we generally call persons or subjects. If we can call actual entities (particulars) first-order entities, conceptual entities might be called second-order entities. The second-order objects are real, only in so far as they are related to the ontological reals, which are the first-order entities.

Unlike the second-order conceptual entities, the first-order actual entities have ontological autonomy, i.e. they exist on their own. An entity that exists on its own is traditionally called “substance.” In contemporary philosophical literature, however, the term “particular” is preferred, as it can rid itself of some of the interpretations, especially the theological ones, which the concept of substance gathered over the centuries.

As Aristotle suggested, particulars are individual things which exist in their own right, endowed with some identifying features or properties. For Aristotle, the paradigm cases of particulars are, as he put it, “the individual man” or “the individual horse” (see Kaipayil 2008: 38). So a particular is an entity with some identity, like this particular person or that particular thing.

Particulars may broadly be of two kinds: basic particulars and corporate particulars. Basic particulars are unitary particulars, i.e. individuals with greater

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internal unity. On the contrary, corporate or compound particulars come into being because of basic particulars and have only a functional unity. While an individual man or an individual horse is an example of a basic particular, a house or a car may be the candidate for a corporate particular. Regarding social entities like family and community, I am afraid they cannot be particulars. They are just concepts referring to groups of individuals standing in certain agreed-upon relations.

Particulars, both basic and corporate, have their identities and it is the identity that makes an entity a particular, say a particular man or a particular horse. The identity of a particular is constituted by its properties (qualities or features). If you want to describe a thing, the only way to do it is through describing its properties.

In a wide sense, properties are entities predicated of particulars. These entities which play properties are generally taken to be universals, in the sense that the selfsame property can be instantiated by different individuals. Redness can be instantiated (individuated) by a red pen and a red carpet, for instance. This does not mean that properties are out there floating and waiting to be exemplified. There are no floating properties (see Kaipayil 2008: 65). All properties are properties of some individuals (particulars), whose predicates they are.

Following Locke's distinction between "primary" and "secondary" qualities,² we can speak of primary and secondary properties. Primary properties are properties that exist in the objects independent of the perceiver of these properties, like electrical charge of charged particles. Secondary properties are perceiver-

dependent properties of the objects, like the colour and smell of a rose. I think we can also include evaluative properties, like truth, good and beauty, among secondary properties.

What about the laws of nature? Are they particulars or properties? I think they are properties. Laws are internal to things, because they are dispositions or tendencies of particulars to behave in a certain way. The law of a negatively charged particle to repel another negatively charged particle or the tendency of water to flow is not external to them. "Things are disposed to behave in a certain way of necessity, so laws are not something that needs to be added to nature to make it work" (Mumford 2009: 478). As the Rig Veda (1.105.12) puts it: "The flowing of the floods is Law." The flood flows and the law for the flood to flow is internal to the flood.

Particular and property cater to each other ontologically. Though two distinct ontological concepts, neither of them has reality without the other (cf. Kaipayil 2008: 65). Just as no properties can exist except as properties of some particular, a particular cannot exist without its constitutive properties. Given this, properties are ultimately the way a particular is.

If properties choose to disappear, particulars themselves will disappear. A particular is, indeed, an integrate (integral unity) of properties. Properties constitute the particulars. Does it make a case for arguing that properties themselves should exist first with their causal features for instantiation and that properties should be treated as particulars?³ No, I don't think so. We should not overstate the notion of "constitution," because it is not like a bunch of

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properties coming together and forming a new particular. The basic furniture of the world comes to us always as propertied particulars. "Constitution," then, pertains primarily to the structure of the particular. The structure of the particular is laid out in properties.

Particulars exist and have their identity due to their being endowed with properties. Change occurs to particulars when they shed some of their existing properties or/and acquire some new ones. But if they want to retain their self-identify, they need to somehow keep most of their essential properties. Despite whether it is by enduring or by perduring that a particular persists,⁴ a particular can continue through time only by retaining its identity-defining properties.⁵ The Taj Mahal at time t_1 and the Taj Mahal at time t_2 are the same Taj Mahal, as long as it kept most of the original material and most of the original structure. If the Taj Mahal loses these identifying properties, it will stop to be that particular we know of as "Taj Mahal."

Particulars can be classified into different kinds (sorts), based on the properties they are endowed with. It is possible for one and the same particular to belong to more than one class, provided it qualifies for such an inclusion by their properties. We already said that particulars can be of two kinds, basic particulars or corporate particulars. Another broad division would be: concrete particulars and abstract particulars.

Concrete particulars are physical particulars endowed with materiality. Mass, energy and spatial-temporal identification constitute the materiality of the physical entities we know. Some physical particulars have an additional feature which we call life. Life distinguishes an entity as an organism. From a

biological point of view, an entity is considered an organism, a living particular, if it is capable of performing two kinds of activities: metabolism and reproduction. The case is not that an entity has life first and then performs these functions; rather these and other organic functions, made possible by the complex biochemistry of the given particular, together constitute what we call life. Some higher-order organisms have yet another property which we call mind. These organisms are capable of complex cerebral functions that effect their mental states, like cognitions (thoughts), emotions and decisions. These mental states are collectively called mind.⁶

Coming to abstract particulars, the particulars that transcend spatial-temporal specifications, philosophers differ a lot in their “ontological commitments,” ranging from total denial of such entities to exaggerated realism about them. Taking properties, relations, mental states, laws, numbers, etc. to be features of particulars, the only kind of abstract particulars I tend to admit are metaphysical principles (cf. Kaipayil 2008: 69-70). Metaphysical principles are explanatory posits, which means, they are postulations we make in our attempt to explain the world in ultimate terms. As we said earlier (section 2.1), science is the best available empirical explanation of the world. But science leaves many questions about reality unanswered and these explanatory gaps needs to be filled in. It is here metaphysics steps in. Because of its “abstractness,” a metaphysical principle is beyond proof or disproof. Its probability or reasonableness depends on its explanatory power.

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3.3. Relation

Relation holds between two entities. Self-relation is impossible. There should be at least two *relata* for a relation to exist. "It is hard not to think of relations as dependent on relata in the sense that, without the relata, there is nothing to relate" (Heil 2009: 311).

Sometimes relations are considered properties which particulars have, like the parent-child relation as a property a parent and a child have. But in fact their property is the property of being a parent or a child which comes into existence because of their parent-child relation. Nonetheless, being a parent or being a child is a relational property.

Relations can be intra-relations and inter-relations. Intra-relations exist between the constitutive elements of a basic particular. Every particular is a unity, a unity of its constituents. Nothing exists, except as a unity. A basic particular is constituted of its sub-basic particulars. A sub-basic particular is a basic particular which has become the constitutive component of another basic particular. The model of an atom and its sub-atomic particles is a telling illustration of this concept. Take, for example, the simplest atom, hydrogen. A hydrogen atom is composed of one proton and one electron. The proton and the electron which make this atom are themselves basic particulars. But they became sub-basic particulars to this hydrogen atom, which is the basic particular in this case. The relation that holds between two sub-basic particulars in a basic particular is an intra-relation.

Inter-relations exist between two or more basic particulars. As inter-relations are easier to comprehend, they do not require any illustration. However, I would

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like to say a word about two possible effects of these relations. Interrelations can result in changes in interacting particulars, like *a*'s being a parent because of *a*'s relation to *b* (child). In some cases, interrelations can result in creation of new particulars, like two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom producing a molecule of water.

One kind of relation that has been extensively discussed in philosophy and science is causality. Without belief in causality we cannot explain the regularity we find in the world. We organize empirical experience into a causal order and make sense of what we experience. In this sense, “[c]ausal necessity is something we postulate to explain the world around us” (Garrett 2006: 66). The objectivity of causation is presupposed in science and in our everyday life; without this presupposition, the daily business of both science and our ordinary life would become impossible. If the Humean sceptic insists on some hard evidence in our experience of *a* really causing *b*, I am afraid we don't have any to offer her, except that when *a* acted *b* occurred.⁷

An intricate problem associated with causality is whether the effect is identical with the cause or not.⁸ If *b* (effect) is altogether new and is different from *a* (cause), *a* wouldn't be the cause of *b*; and if *b* pre-existed in *a*, *b* fails to be the effect of *a*. Causality is a relation; the cause and the effect are relational to each other in an antecedent-consequent relation. Being related in a cause-effect relation entails neither their identity nor their non-identity but only their antecedent-consequent relatedness. We know, for example, thoughts and feelings are caused by electrical and chemical

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communication between brain cells. In this example, our brain's electrochemical process and our mental states are causally connected, without the effect being identical to the cause.

We have not discussed so far what relation per se is. Is relation real or merely conceptual? If it is real, how does relation relate to things? If it is purely conceptual, what is this concept about? I said at the beginning of this section that relations are not properties, although there are properties which are relational, like a 's being the parent of b . Relations are not particulars either, for relation can happen only if there are at least two interacting particulars. If relation is neither a particular nor a property, it can only be a concept, an empty concept like being and reality. "Relation" is that convenient term or concept we use to mean the interaction of particulars. Interaction does not exist independent of interacting particulars. If particulars choose to drop out of all interactions, there wouldn't be any relations.

Particulars are relational by nature, because they always interact among themselves. It is through interaction with other particulars that a given particular keeps itself in existence, e.g. an organism taking in nutrients from its environments and keeping itself alive. Also, it is through interaction between particulars that new particulars are generated, e.g. two hydrogen atoms combining in nuclear fusion to make one helium atom. The world you and I live in and are part of is constituted of interacting particulars. So at the end of the day, what exists is interacting particulars. This also means reality is nothing other than particulars in interaction.⁹

3.4. Being-principle

At the beginning of this chapter, we said that all philosophy, especially metaphysics, is done through concepts. Concepts cannot remain isolated. In order to construct a theory, concepts should be arranged to become a conceptual scheme. A theory is indeed a group of basic concepts linked together into a conceptual system. In this gathering of concepts into a scheme, the movement is always in the direction of the increasing simplicity of the conceptual basis (cf. Einstein 1936), until we reach an apex concept to which all concepts could be linked. In other words, the prospect of a theory is to gather our experiences and ideas around a central concept.¹⁰ Coming to ontic relationalism, the relationalist theory of being, this central concept should be the ultimate guarantor of relationality (the relatedness of reality). Any concept that has the explanatory power to play this role can be a candidate. I, however, endorse the candidature of "Being-principle."

Like any other metaphysical concept, Being-principle is also a postulation. We postulate this concept as the ultimate explanation of the world we know and deal with. One may wonder why we need any such posit. Well, it is for the simple reason of what is called the principle of sufficient cause. The principle of sufficient reason, in its classical formulation by Leibniz (*The Monadology*, 32), states that there can be no fact real or no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it should be so and not otherwise. In simple terms, "[e]verything that is the case must have a reason why it is the case" (Pruss 2006: 3). It is a necessary postulate of knowledge.

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The principle of sufficient reason is different from the principle of causality, which states that everything should have a cause. Causality applies only to cause-effect sequence of things, like *a* has caused *b* or *b* has been caused by *a*. Thus causality is a relation between sequentially connected relata. Sufficient reason, on the contrary, is an explanation why something is the case. Sufficient reason can be causal or otherwise. In either case, to know a thing's sufficient reason is to know the principle which constitutes that thing (cf. Kaipayil 2008: 60).

Being-principle is the sufficient reason why the world is such and not otherwise. In order to know what Being-principle is, we should first know what the world is like. In section 2.1 we mentioned how the world basically looks like to our scientific perception of it. To complement what we discussed there, I would like to add a quick note on the history of the world.

According to the generally held Big Bang theory, some 13.7 billion years ago, the initial singularity of elemental particles, whose intense density created enormous heat, exploded into elementary particles. The elementary particles came together to form hydrogen and other lighter atoms; these lighter atoms came together and formed stars, and fusion reactions in stars and supernova explosions created heavier atoms. At some point later, chemical interactions of carbon molecules and minerals led to the development of simple organic molecules, such as amino acids, lipids and sugars, which eventually developed into more complex structures of genetic material and thus the first living organisms came into existence. Finally, mind appeared in the universe when the biochemical

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complexity of certain organisms caused the development of sensory and nervous systems, which enabled them to interpret their sense stimuli. This is roughly the picture science makes of the physical world. No one knows what the future holds for the world. Speculations range from a flat universe to a closed universe to an open universe.¹¹

Science cannot tell us anything about the pre-history of the universe, i.e. what existed before the theoretical Big Bang; nor can it tell whether there exist parallel universes. It tells only about the universe at hand, the universe you and I live in and are part of. Hence, I believe, it is enough that metaphysics and ontology postulate the sufficient reason of this universe. In other words, the concept of Being-principle is slated for the job of being the sufficient reason of the world we know and deal with.

Having said the above, I admit that a legitimate objection can arise: why can't the world be its own reason? Yes, it is possible to conceive of the world that way. Owing to their interdependence, individual things may require an agential explanation for their origin and continued existence but the world as a whole may not. The world may be there eternally in some form and can self-operate with its own inner principles and laws. This naturalistic explanation, that the world is self-existent, self-organizing entity, is acceptable and is indeed a reasonable metaphysical postulation. Similarly reasonable is the explanation of the world in reference to Being-principle as its possible sufficient reason. The advantage of postulating Being-principle is that it gives us a single concept to explain both the individual phenomena in the world and the world as a whole.

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Moreover, Being-principle we are talking about is not a principle external to the world but its internal principle, accounting for its existence, structure and activity.¹²

Now let me come back to the picture of the world science depicts and see what we can gather from it. The world as a whole and each of its constituent entities exhibits three most fundamental features: existence, order and activity (cf. Kaipayil 2008: 70-72). Firstly, the world exists; the sufficient reason for the world's existence may be called the principle of existence. Secondly, the world exhibits order. The sufficient reason for this orderliness of the world may be called the principle of intelligence. Thirdly, the world is active; the sufficient reason for the world's activity may be called the principle of force. Since existence, order and activity are simultaneous features of the world, these three principles (existence, intelligence and force) cannot exist independently as separate principles. They exist and act together in coordination. So Being-principle is a unity of these three primal principles: existence, intelligence and force (Kaipayil 2008: 72-73). It is called being-principle, because it itself is a being and is the principle (reason) behind other beings.

The fourth fundamental feature of the world, the feature that is very significant for relationalism, is its simultaneous plurality and unity. The world at all times, from the Big Bang to the present, manifests that it is not a single substance but a unity of many particulars. On the one hand there exist a plurality of things and on the other there is inter-relatedness, an underlying unity, among them. If Being-principle accounts for the existence, order and activity of the

world, we can assume that the same Being-principle is the reason for this feature too.

As principle of existence, intelligence and activity, Being-principle is not exhausted by or limited to any one being. This accounts for why the world is a plurality. At the same time, all beings are grounded in Being-principle. This accounts for the unity of the world.

Finally, I think I should add a cautionary note to refrain one from any quick identification of Being-principle with God. Even as God can be interpreted as the being-principle of the world (cf. Kaipayil 2002: 46, 2003: 41-42, 2008: 73), I consider Being-principle and God as belonging to two disciplines, ontology and theology. I, nonetheless, admit that ontology and theology do intersect at many junctions and inform each other as to how we can make sense of reality and engage with it meaningfully.¹³

3.5. Structure of Ontic Relationalism

Now that major concepts are clarified, we need to put them in their proper place in order to explain how they hang together and make a relationalist theory of being.

The key player in the structure of critical relationalism is particular. All that exists are particulars, including Being-principle. Particulars have their identities due to their properties. But properties have no independent existence; they exist only as properties of particulars. What actually exists in the world are propertied particulars - you and me, the tree and the tiger, atoms and molecules, and, if you want, houses and cars. So the world is a world of particulars. We

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usually group these particulars (individuals) into classes or categories for the purpose of description. Classes do not exist though, except as classes of individuals.

Particulars stand in various relations with other particulars, and relations are different kinds of interaction between particulars. Being interactions, relations have no independent existence. They come into existence only when and as long as particulars interact.

All particulars that we do everyday business with have spatiotemporal determinations. So, ontic relationalism cannot keep space-time out of discussion. In the pre-relativity period, *pace* Leibniz, space and time were thought to be out there, with objects freely moving in them. Relativity, with its space-time continuum concept, made it possible to think of space-time in relational terms. This makes our job a lot easier.

Space and time are distance and duration respectively. Distance is the distance between particulars and duration is the duration of how long a particular is in existence relative to other particulars. All measurement of space and time can only be done with respect to some particulars. Space-time, therefore, is a system whose coordinates are determined by particulars. Particulars make space-time possible, and particulars make possible its expansion and contraction.¹⁴ If all particulars choose to exit from existence, space-time will disappear with them.

Now let us see what place Being-principle has in the world of particulars. Being-principle is also a particular, albeit with difference. Unlike physical particulars, Being-principle is not subject to spatiotemporal

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limitations. So it can be immanent in all particulars and yet transcend them at the same time. Another difference is that Being-principle is a necessary particular, while other particulars are contingent particulars. It is necessary, not because it exists necessarily but it is the necessary condition for all other particulars to exist and act. Particulars are rooted in Being-principle as their source, and Being-principle expresses itself in particulars as their origin.

As we said in 3.4, Being-principle, as principle of existence, intelligence and force, is never exhausted by particulars and hence no particular expresses it fully. Moreover, each particular is a unique expression too. Because of its inexhaustiveness as principle, Being-principle has the possibility of originating and sustaining the plurality of particulars. Because of this ontological possibility of Being-principle to originate and keep in existence the plurality of particulars, the world has the ontological possibility of having plurality as one of its two relationalist features, the other feature being unity.

The second relationalist feature of the world, namely unity, is also possible because of Being-principle. Because of their rootedness in one and the same Being-principle, particulars have the possibility of being ontologically open to other particulars, within and outside their own categories, even as keeping their own identities. They interconnect and make one world, orderly and ordinarily harmonious.¹⁵

Having said the above, I do not mean that Being-principle intervenes and determines how each and every particular acts in a given time and place. I think how particulars behave is left mostly to dispositions or

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laws which particulars are endowed with.¹⁶ This also means necessity does not cancel out chance (randomness) completely.¹⁷ Should two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom meet, they will produce a molecule of water. It is a necessity. But which hydrogen atoms and which oxygen atoms meet at a given time and place and produce which molecule of water is almost a chance. Maybe, due to randomness there is variety and surprise in the world!

We have two more concepts to accommodate: being and reality, the most celebrated concepts in the entire lexicon of metaphysics. However, if particulars are the only reals, the ontological status of being and reality is almost a foregone conclusion. They are two ways of speaking about particulars (see section 3.1). Being is the highest, honorific term we use to speak about things that actually exist or we take to actually exist. Since all that actually exists are particulars, being turns out to be particulars, necessary or contingent. There is no being in the abstract. Being is always in the concrete, as particular beings. All particulars are relational, for they exist in their relatedness to the supreme particular, Being-principle, and other particulars. Since all particulars are relational, being is relational. All beings, owing to their relationality, together make an ontological (existential) structure. We call this ontological structure by another honorific term, namely reality. Since all constitutive participants of reality are relational by nature, we also say reality is relational.

3.6. Aesthetic and Ethical Significance

A philosophical theory, like a scientific theory, is an explanation of the world, albeit in more ultimate terms. But unlike a scientific theory, a philosophical theory seeks also the meaning of life (cf. Kaipayil 1995: 94-95; 2002: 18-21; 2003: 2).¹⁸ Metaphysics is no exception to it. Thus the ultimate use of metaphysics is to find the significance of reality for our lives.

I think what makes us distinctly human is not only our capacity for abstract reflection but also our gift for aesthetic appreciation and ethical action. So no ontology is complete without aesthetics and ethics. Ontology is basic to aesthetics and ethics, for the way we think about being (ontology) is mostly the way we feel about being (aesthetics), and the way we think and feel about being is the way we treat being (ethics).¹⁹

Aesthetics is our disinterested appreciation of the beauty of things. Aesthetics, from the point of view of relationalism we articulated hitherto, is then our appreciation of particulars as expressions of the primal particular, Being-principle. When we become aware that the world we live in and are part of is grounded in the one Being-principle, it will lead us to admire and care for creation as "sacred."²⁰ This aesthetic experience also involves our perception of the splendid diversity and unity of things, leading us to celebrate diversity, even as we recognize their ontological unity.

Aesthetic appreciation acquires special significance when it comes to the particulars of our own kind, other humans. A human being is a marvelous display of the features of Being-principle – its existence, thought and energy. Humanity holds a special place in the universe,

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though we cannot hold an anthropic interpretation that the universe has been made and fine-tuned for humans.

We are a marvelous creation, part of the universe, but capable of beholding it in wonder and admiration. Yet, only with another human being can you and I enter into a genuine communication. The best available way for us to enter into communication and communion with Being-principle and experience its intelligent existence in action is by entering into communication with other humans, because you and I, by virtue of our existential symmetry, can speak the language of common humanity. This aesthetic appreciation of another human being as one's communicative partner puts us on our ethical responsibility to respect every human being and commit ourselves to their flourishing. Beholding the other in aesthetic appreciation and holding the other in ethical care is what brings satisfaction of life, as it fulfills our call to be human.

Notes

¹ I, however, disagree with Stroll (2009: 217-18) that science is "factual" and philosophy, "conceptual," and science and metaphysics will exist in parallel. I believe that scientific theories are also conceptual in nature and all theories are theories about facts of our experience. Metaphysics kicks in when physics reaches its conceptual limits.

² Locke's primary qualities of physical objects include size, shape, weight and solidity, among others, and secondary qualities include colour, taste and smell.

³ On the trope view, properties themselves are just as much particulars as the things that have them. The basic particulars (e.g. cats and dogs) are thought to be made up of these abstract particulars. For more on trope theory, see Kaipayil 2008: 76n14.

⁴ The two current views about how particulars persist through time are: endurantism and perdurantism. While for endurantism objects persist by “enduring,” that is, by being wholly present at each moment of their existence, perdurantism holds that objects persist by “perduring,” that is, by having different temporal parts located at different times (see Gilmore 2007: 177; Loux 2002: 221). It is hard to choose between these two views.

⁵ For more on identity, see Kaipayil 2008: 67-68, 2003: 31-32.

⁶ This means the mind is not a substance but only a functional unity of the mental states effected by neural exchange of chemical-electrical impulses.

⁷ However, seeing the laws of nature as natural dispositions of things to act in certain ways can withstand some of the Humean criticism of causality.

⁸ Sankhya holds that the effect pre-exists in the cause and the effect is only the expression of the pre-contained. Vaisheshika’s view is that the cause and the effect are not identical and every effect is something new.

⁹ Does this ontological prioritization of particulars (the view that particulars are the only ontological reals and that being, reality and relation are discourse about particulars) put me in the nominalist camp? Not necessarily. Of course, relationalism shares with nominalism the idea that what exists ultimately are particulars. But I also accept the reality of properties as ways (modes) in which particulars exist.

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Besides, I admit at least one metaphysical principle, Being-principle, for explanatory reasons.

¹⁰ There may be some truth to what Heidegger famously said: “Every thinker thinks only one thought” (1968: 50).

¹¹ In a flat universe, the expansion of the universe would cease after a while; in a closed universe, the universe would collapse upon itself; and in an open universe, the universe would expand forever.

¹² Furthermore, the world can even be thought of as contemporaneous (instantaneous) with Being-principle. In this regard, it may be noted that Augustine (*De Civitate Dei*, 10.31; 11.4) and Aquinas (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 2.31-38; *Summa Theologica*, 1.46; *De Aeternitate Mundi contra Murmurantes*) saw no contradiction of reason in saying that something made by God has always existed. For both Augustine and Aquinas, the non-eternity of the world is a question of faith rather than reason. It may also be noted that according to Augustine and Aquinas laws of nature and God’s design don’t contradict. For them, the created things are patterned after their exemplary ideas, eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*), existing in the divine mind (e.g., Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, 46.2; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.15.1, 1.44.3). Augustine also had a notion of natural evolution, according to which the “seminal reasons” (*rationes seminales*) God placed in nature evolve according to the laws established by the divine wisdom (e.g., *De genesi ad litteram*, 5.21.45, 9.17.32; *De Trinitate*, 3.8.13-19).

¹³ God talk is mainly religious talk. What philosophy can arguably do is to examine the reasonableness of believing in God’s existence. Panikkar has it right when he said: “The

traditional ‘proofs of the existence of God’ offered by Christian scholasticism, for example, only prove the non-irrationality of the divine existence to those who already believe in God” (2006:16). So the similarity and difference between Being-principle and God is something like that of the Supreme Being and God. Being-principle, like the Supreme Being, is a concept of rational abstraction, while God is a concept of faith, with the possibility of God being conceived differently in different faith traditions. *A fortiori*, God is the object of worship.

¹⁴ According to Big Bang model, our entire cosmos had swelled from a singularity to the size of 94 billion light years across and still continues to expand. This shows that space is created by the expansion of matter. It is possible that there can be voids (devoid of any objects) in space, but the boundary of space is determined by the farthest objects.

¹⁵ Thanks to their rootedness in Being-principle, particulars, despite their own identities, are able to enter into harmonious relation with other particulars and contribute towards an orderly universe. But how can we explain the presence of evil, which is disruption of this harmony? The selfsame problem has always been a challenge to theism, yet I wonder if anyone has ever offered anything better than Leibniz’s “the best of all possible worlds” argument. Despite its imperfections, it is the best of all possible worlds God could have created, according to Leibniz. The world could have been more harmonious and more perfect than it is, but we don’t know why it is not. Another way to look at evil is to see it as exceptions due to randomness involved in the working of nature (see below n. 17). Whatever be the explanation of

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evil, as I said elsewhere (cf. Kaipayil 2003: 44-45), the presence of evil is a challenge to us to do good to others.

¹⁶ In this regard, I find the Thomistic notion makes quite a sense that God acts through secondary causes.

¹⁷ It may be noted in this connection that quantum mechanics, with its uncertainty principle, indicates that events can only be predicted with probabilities. Moreover, a law of nature holds only when other things are equal, leaving the probability that it may not hold under certain circumstances (cf. Schrenk 2007: 9).

¹⁸ The concept of philosophy as guidance to life has recently been revived by the newly emerged discipline called philosophical counseling. The aim of philosophical counseling is to help people critically examine the ideas and perceptions associated with their specific problems and come to terms with life in a positive and meaningful way. For more on philosophical counseling, see Schuster 1999, Raabe 2001, Marinoff 2001.

¹⁹ This parallels how we manage our daily experience by the triple action of cognition (reason), emotion and volition. Cognition leads to emotion, and cognition and emotion lead to decision. Every emotion has a cognitive content to it, and no volition is without thought and emotion.

²⁰ Spirituality may, after all, be our sensitivity to this sacredness of things: life, humanity and nature (cf. Mohanty 2002: 120).

Conclusion

The world we live in and deal with, the very world which we are part of, is a world of plurality on the one hand and a world of unity on the other. The plurality and unity of the world is attested, not just by our everyday experience but by modern science as well. Hence it is philosophically essential to address how we can make sense of the world's irreducible plurality and inescapable unity, because the task of philosophy, especially metaphysics, is to unravel the structure and meaning of the world.

Metaphysical monism, both substance monism and process monism, overstates unity, while pluralism, dualism included, overstates plurality. Most metaphysical theories fall into either camp. What we need is a perspective that goes beyond this divide and accommodates both pluralism and unity in a conceptual scheme. Maybe, relationalism can provide this new perspective. Indeed, many a philosophical, ethical and social problem cannot be adequately addressed except from a relationalist point of view.

Relationalism states there is no unity, except as the unity of participating entities. Entities are the carriers of existence. If entities were to disappear, there wouldn't be any existence left, let alone the world. Yet, entities are ontologically open to one another that they interrelate and make one unified world.

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No metaphysical theory can sustain itself unless it is founded on ontology, because all philosophical and metaphysical questions melt down to the question of being, to the question of how we interpret the meaning of being. So relationalism too requires a foundational theory of being, ontic relationalism as I called it. According to the relationalist theory of being, or ontic relationalism, I proposed, particular (individual) has the claim for ontological primacy, as being exists only as particulars. Particulars, however, are inherently relational as they are ontologically open to other particulars and can interrelate and make the fabric of reality. Accordingly, for ontic relationalism, the particular in its relationality is the meaning of being.

From the point of view of ontic relationalism, the task of ontology is to discover and articulate the relationalist meaning of the world. Ontology, being humanity's perennial search for the principles of being, can probably do this interpretative job better, if done with reference to a theoretical Being-principle in which particulars and their relationality can be thought to be grounded.

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Joseph Kaipayil

RELATIONALISM

A Theory of Being

Relationalism is not merely a view that things are relational or inter-related. As the author sees it, relationalism is basically a theory of being, which addresses the metaphysical problem of the one and the many. Unity and plurality are inherent features of reality. Neither of them can be explained away. Hence we need a new, relationalist perceptive which accommodates both these features of the world. In this work, *Relationalism : A Theory of Being*, the author tries to give an ontological foundation and framework for such a perspective, by interpreting the meaning of being in terms of particular (individual) in its relationality. This work provides many an insight into how we can look at not only metaphysics but epistemology and ethics as well from a relationalist point of view.

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